



Regional Competitiveness Program

*Helping communities strengthen their economic competitiveness through
regional cooperation*

Program Guidelines August 2001



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Introduction

The reality of a global market offers an array of opportunities for Virginia's communities. At the same time it increases the competition for investment and job creation. Virginia must now compete with the Pacific Rim, Europe and elsewhere, in addition to neighboring states, for new jobs and investment. In this environment Virginia and its communities must enhance all aspects of economic competitiveness if the Commonwealth is to remain a vibrant place to live, work and do business.

The General Assembly passed the Regional Competitiveness Act to help communities strengthen their economic competitiveness through regional cooperation. The Act provides an incentive for communities to undertake new levels of regional activity to address obstacles to economic competitiveness. Meaningful changes are needed in order for regions to capitalize on new economic opportunities and to remove barriers to economic competitiveness.

In 1996, Governor Allen appointed a twelve-member Advisory Committee to provide guidance in designing a program to implement the Regional Competitiveness Act. The Committee recognized that a high standard of new behavior in regional cooperation is needed to effect positive change in Virginia's economic competitiveness. While recognizing that many regions have made progress on regional cooperation, this initiative is not about business as usual. It is about stimulating new, meaningful responses that take regions to higher levels of cooperation to specifically respond to the concerns and issues that impact economic competitiveness. After its first five years of qualification with the program, each partnership has the opportunity to re-qualify for another five-year period. In 2001, the Advisory Committee reconvened to review the first five years of the program and to provide policy guidance in the development of re-qualification procedures for the program. While the re-qualification process recognizes each region's past progress on regional cooperation, it requires each region to continue to reach for higher levels of cooperation.

The attached guidelines for the Regional Competitiveness Program (RCP) provide flexibility for regions to identify opportunities to enhance economic competitiveness and develop strategies to resolve them. The Advisory Committee spent considerable time discussing the kinds of projects and initiatives that should be eligible for consideration under the RCP. While it is expected that every locality and region could enumerate specific problems which affect their ability to be competitive, and therefore require attention and funding, the Advisory Committee believes that communities and regions will be better served if projects for which RCP funds are used have the potential for generating more immediate economic return to the region. For example, collective efforts to develop regional industrial parks, including land acquisition, infrastructure improvements, transportation access and shell buildings, will hopefully yield private sector investment and new jobs, and will broaden and enlarge the revenue base for the localities which are part of a regional compact. Other examples of projects which can have the effect of generating new revenues and jobs to the

region may be the development of regional tourism attractions or facilities, regional telecommunication infrastructure to meet unique regional needs, or regional job training centers specifically tailored to meet the needs of the area's industry base. The Committee realized that there are problems which are more endemic or deeply rooted, but it will take far more than the resources available under the RCP to resolve these issues, and addressing them through this initiative may not be the best and wisest investment for the region as a whole.

In the final analysis, the Advisory Committee decided to leave the criteria open, so that a full range of projects and initiatives can be considered. Nevertheless, the work of the Committee urges regions to submit projects that demonstrate the principles of regional cooperation, leverage available and new resources, and will result in shared benefits for all participating localities in the near versus the long-term.

The flexibility for regions to determine solutions to meet their individual challenges and the need for a high standard of new regional behavior set the context for implementing the Regional Competitiveness Act. The Advisory Committee encourages each region of the Commonwealth to view the Regional Competitiveness Act as an opportunity to substantively improve their ability to meet both economic challenges and opportunities. By addressing the critical needs regions face, as outlined above, we can move Virginia forward and ensure its continuing prosperity.

Program Purpose

The General Assembly passed the Regional Competitiveness Act in 1996 in order to enhance economic competitiveness for all regions of the Commonwealth. To do this, the Act establishes an incentive fund to encourage joint activities designed to address regional economic competitiveness needs.

National research has demonstrated that in areas around the country where localities work together cooperatively, economic competitiveness is enhanced. Quality of life indicators such as income disparity between localities, area median income, and job creation are more positive in areas that interact on a regional level. The Regional Competitiveness Program is intended to support a more economically competitive Commonwealth and a better quality of life for Virginia's citizens.

The Regional Competitiveness Program is designed to both reward existing regional behavior and stimulate *new* behavior – planning and acting regionally. Even areas of the state where regional activity has already been initiated are intended to increase their efforts and reach new levels of cooperation in order to qualify for incentives. It should be carefully noted that the Regional Competitiveness Program is *not a mandate*. The incentive funds are available to localities that *choose* to carry out new levels of regional cooperation. Regions that do not demonstrate a *significant increase* in regional activity will not qualify or re-qualify for incentive funding.

In order for substantive change to take place in the way communities interact, it is necessary to involve all sectors of the community. The Act calls on government, business, education, and civic leaders to join in partnership to chart a course for improved regional economic competitiveness. The new ways of working together for which the Act calls will necessitate forming effective collaborative partnerships to successfully address economic competitiveness issues.

Program Guidelines

Introduction

In the fall of 1996, Governor Allen appointed the Regional Competitiveness Program Advisory Committee, as authorized in the Act, to provide policy guidance in the development of the Program. (Please see Appendix A for a listing of the members of the Advisory Committee.) The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) was charged with developing procedures for incentive fund distribution and administering the fund.

After its appointment, the Advisory Committee held an initial meeting on October 15, 1996, and approved a process for public participation. In accordance with this process, DHCD conducted five information and input sessions around the state. Based on comments received during these sessions and issues that were identified, the Advisory Committee provided policy guidance to DHCD that is reflected in these Program Guidelines.

In the spring of 2001, the Advisory Committee reconvened to review the first five years of the program and to provide policy guidance in the development of re-qualification procedures for the program. To prepare for this, in February 2001, DHCD staff visited the seven partnerships that have the opportunity to request re-qualification in the spring of 2002. These site visits served two purposes: to bring the re-qualification timeline to each partnership's attention and to receive partnership input into the process. In June 2001, public information and input sessions were held in Roanoke and Richmond. The Advisory Committee used this information and input in its determinations about re-qualification procedures.

The Program Guidelines are intended to serve as a framework for the Regional Competitiveness Program. Details on application procedures for incentive funds will be contained in the application package.

Funding

The Regional Competitiveness Incentive Fund is subject to appropriation by the General Assembly. The Program Guidelines outline the fund distribution process that will be used regardless of the amount of funding available.

Fund Allocation System

Intent

In order to be eligible for incentive funds, regions must meet several criteria. (Please see Requirements for Qualification or Requirements for Re-qualification.) Once these criteria have been met, the following allocation guidelines will be used to distribute funds.

General Guidelines

1. A region's funding eligibility will be based on meeting the guidelines on regional configuration, partnership, and strategic plan, and on receiving at least 20 points in the scoring system.
2. Calculations
 - a. Once eligibility for funding has been determined, the population of all eligible regions will be totaled. Each eligible region will receive a proportion of funding equal to its proportion of that population total. The most recent final population estimates from the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service will be used.
 - b. When language in the Appropriation Act directs a minimum funding floor for eligible regions, all eligible regions with funding allocations below the floor after the application of calculation 2a, will receive the minimum floor funding. The population of these minimum floor regions will be subtracted from the population total. The remaining eligible regions will receive a proportion of the remaining funding equal to its proportion of this revised population total.
3. In the event that a locality is a member of more than one region and partnership, the funding applications from both regions must specify the portion of that locality's population that is to be associated with each one. (Please see Regional Configurations.) This will ensure that no segment of a locality's population is double-counted in fund distribution. *Please note that any regional configuration different from the configuration in the region's currently approved qualification requires prior approval from DHCD.*
4. Eligible regions will receive annual incentive fund payments for a five-year period as long as the regional partnership continues to exist and function effectively. Effective functioning is based on the satisfactory implementation of the joint activities outlined in the funding application. (Please see Performance Accountability.)
5. Regions may reapply for continued funding after the end of each five-year funding period.
6. Prior to submission of a region's application for incentive funds, a formula for distribution of the funds within the region shall be agreed upon by the Partnership. This distribution formula must be endorsed by resolution of the governing bodies of the participating jurisdictions. (Please see Guidelines for Regional Partnerships.)

7. Funds are incentive payments to increase economic competitiveness through regional efforts. Regions have wide flexibility in both how they distribute the funds and how the funds will be used.
8. Regional Partnerships will be monitored on progress in implementing strategic plan activities. (Please see Performance Accountability.)
9. There is no requirement for matching funds from the regional partnerships or from localities within the regions.

Requirements for Submission

Regional Configurations

Intent

The intent of the RCP is to provide an incentive to form regional partnerships that will address economic competitiveness issues affecting its region and to encourage and support effective cooperative working relationships among localities. The following guidelines and requirements are intended to encourage regional configurations of localities that are of sufficient scale to address regional competitiveness issues while also reducing or eliminating regional fragmentation.

Minimum Requirements

A region comprises the cities, towns of greater than 3,500 population, and counties within a planning district boundary that indicate their commitment to forming a regional partnership through a resolution of their governing body. DHCD assumes that participating localities are making a good faith effort to commit to participating for at least a five-year time period.

DHCD will not recognize any regional configuration that contains a combination of fewer than three contiguous cities, counties, or towns. In addition, all three of these localities cannot be part of a single jurisdiction. For example, a region comprising a county and two towns within that county would not qualify.

Regional Configurations That Do Not Require DHCD Approval

A regional configuration that remains the same as it was in the region's currently approved qualification does not require DHCD approval to be recognized as a region for the purposes of this program. Any other configuration does require prior approval as outlined in the next section.

Regional Configurations Requiring DHCD Approval

A regional configuration that is different from the configuration in the region's currently approved qualification can be formed with the permission of DHCD. In making its determination, DHCD will consider the following:

1. All cities, towns with a population greater than 3,500, and counties within a planning district boundary must be given an opportunity to participate. No regional

configuration will be approved that excludes a locality that passes a resolution indicating that it wishes to be a part of the regional partnership.

2. The RCP is intended to promote regional cooperative efforts of a scale that will positively influence regional competitiveness. All requests for recognition of regions that contain a subset of localities within a planning district are required to provide a rationale that explains why and how the smaller region is more appropriate in addressing competitiveness issues.
3. DHCD will not approve a configuration of localities that might result in a fragmentation of the region.
4. A locality that is outside the planning district, but contiguous to it, may be added to the region at the request of the local governing body and with the concurrence of all participating localities within the planning district it petitions to join, provided that this inclusion does not lead to fragmentation of the remaining planning district.
5. It is possible that a locality may wish to participate in two different regional partnerships. This may be approved provided that a clear method of dividing the population of that locality is agreed upon between the two partnerships for the purposes of fund distribution.
6. It is recognized that some regional partnerships may include localities from outside the Commonwealth. These non-Virginia localities will not be counted toward meeting the requirements for the minimum number of localities nor will their population be counted in the calculation of funding distribution.
7. It is recognized that over time, regional configurations may undergo changes. Such changes may be approved provided that minimum requirements are met. Changes to regional configurations and the resulting partnership membership may require the region to undertake a revision of its plans and activities in order to meet other requirements of this program.

Guidelines for Regional Partnerships

Intent

The RCP is intended to bring together key decision-makers in a region who represent local government, the private sector, secondary and higher education, and civic organizations. Representatives of these sector groups should be individuals in a top-level management position who can influence the allocation of resources needed to address issues of regional competitiveness and intergovernmental cooperation. The following guidelines and requirements are intended to help ensure that these key people are brought together in an organized manner to effect positive change in their region.

General Guidelines

1. Must have approval, by resolution, from the local governing bodies of the region to carry out the provisions of the Act.

2. May be an existing or newly-formed regional planning or economic development organization serving the region.
3. May be an existing non-incorporated regional coalition that has a demonstrated track record of working together to address issues of regional competitiveness.

Membership Requirements

1. To the greatest extent practical, the following sector group representatives shall serve as members of the partnership:
 - a. The mayor or board chairman and chief administrative officer of each member locality
 - b. The corporate leaders within the region
 - c. The president of each institution of higher education in the region
 - d. One or more chairmen of local school boards or school superintendents representing primary and secondary education
 - e. The CEOs or board chairs of local civic associations whose missions and programs are relevant to addressing issues affecting regional competitiveness.
2. Partnerships are encouraged to add other members as appropriate to ensure adequate representation of economic competitiveness issues for that region.
3. Each partnership shall prepare and adopt a charter or bylaws that will outline sector group representation, how members will be selected, and how decisions will be made and implemented by the organization.

Guidelines for Regional Strategic Economic Development Plans

Intent

The RCP is intended to encourage regional efforts to identify key issues affecting economic competitiveness and to support regional, cooperative initiatives designed to address those issues. The method for identifying those key issues and building consensus for action is the regional economic competitiveness strategic plan.

It is not the intent of the RCP to ignore or duplicate recently completed or ongoing strategic planning efforts. Participation by the partnership in the process of conducting a critical analysis of regional issues and prioritizing potential actions is essential to forging mutual understanding and building commitment to implementation of plan recommendations. The strategic plan is intended to be a collaborative process among the various sector groups that focuses attention on critical issues of regional economic competitiveness and identifies and prioritizes actions that should be taken.

The following guidelines and regulations are intended to provide guidance on the strategic planning process and plan content.

General Guidelines

1. The Regional Partnership should review existing local and regional strategic plans in the beginning of its deliberations to provide baseline information.
2. Members of the Regional Partnership shall play an active role in reviewing and analyzing regional information; shall participate in completing a critical analysis of the region; shall participate in identifying and prioritizing issues affecting regional competitiveness; and shall identify key actions necessary to address competitiveness issues.
3. The Regional Partnership shall solicit public participation and input to help identify regional competitiveness needs and opportunities for cooperation.
4. The Regional Partnership shall officially adopt the strategic plan within the 12 months prior to submitting the Request for Qualification or Request for Re-qualification.
5. The regional strategic planning process is intended to help the partnership identify strategies and formulate a plan of action for a five-year period. The plan should be revisited on a yearly basis to determine if adjustments are required to better meet regional competitiveness needs or take advantage of new opportunities.

Specific Requirements

1. The plan shall define economic competitiveness for the region and outline a vision for the future.
2. The plan shall include an analysis of key demographic and economic trends which shall include, at a minimum, a comparison of the following measures between the region and identified competitor regions outside the Commonwealth:
 - a. Median family income changes during the last decade
 - b. Job creation and loss during the last decade
 - c. Regional income disparity trends during the last five years as measured by the differences in median family income levels among the region's localities
 - d. Private sector investment trends during the last decade

Competitor regions should, as much as possible, have similar demographic and economic characteristics to those of the Partnership region.

3. The plan shall identify and prioritize the region's economic competitiveness issues. This is one of the most critical aspects of the planning process and requires the partnership to determine the region's most critical economic competitiveness issues

while considering the current regional environment and other data gathered in items 1 – 3 above.

4. The plan shall outline a prioritized plan of action covering a period of at least five years and shall include proposed joint activities as well as other activities required to address the critical economic competitiveness issues and improve the competitive situation of the region.
5. The plan shall identify organizations or individuals that have the lead responsibility for implementing plan activities.
6. Clearly identified, measurable outcomes shall be established which will be used to assess progress toward addressing regional competitiveness issues and delivery of proposed joint activities. A description should be provided of a progress reporting and monitoring system which will be used to measure progress annually toward implementing strategic plan recommendations.
7. The role, if any, of the Regional Partnership in implementing plan recommendations should be clearly outlined.

Application

Intent

In order to be eligible for incentive funds, a geographic region must be delineated, a regional partnership formed, and a regional strategic economic development plan developed. A formula for distribution of funds within the region must be agreed upon by the partnership. This distribution formula must be endorsed by resolution of the governing body of each participating jurisdiction. Once these items have been accomplished, a region is ready to submit its application for incentive funding.

General Guidelines

1. Any regional configuration other than the configuration in the region's currently approved qualification requires prior approval from DHCD. (Please see Regional Configurations.)
2. Information on regional partnership structure, membership, and strategic plan development may be submitted for review *prior* to the application submission. DHCD will review the regional partnership and the strategic plan to ensure that they meet the guidelines. If these items do not meet the guidelines, DHCD will provide technical assistance and suggest remedial action. This advance review is *optional*.
3. DHCD will provide technical assistance to regions upon request as they are in the process of delineating geographic parameters, creating partnerships, and crafting strategic plans.

4. Applications will include information on joint activities, both existing and new, and how they relate to the regions' strategic plans. Information on activity implementation milestones will also be needed.
5. Re-qualification applications will be due on the March 30 prior to the fiscal year before funding would be distributed to the re-qualified partnership. Any future Qualification applications will be due on March 30 of the fiscal year before funding would be distributed to qualified partnerships. This will ensure that regions that qualify for funding in the calendar year receive funding in the state's following fiscal year as required in the Regional Competitiveness Act.

Scoring System

Intent

The RCP is intended to support actions that address regional competitiveness issues and foster increased cooperative efforts among local governments within the region. The evaluation and scoring system used by DHCD to determine if a region qualifies for Regional Competitiveness Program funding is intended to recognize and reward activities that directly address key economic competitiveness issues identified in the regional strategic plan.

General Guidelines

1. Regional Partnerships shall make application to DHCD to be scored under the fourteen issue areas outlined in the Regional Competitiveness Act. (Please see Appendix C.) A total score of at least twenty points is required to qualify or re-qualify for Regional Competitiveness Program funding.
2. No more than ten points shall be awarded for joint activities that were in existence prior to July 1 of the year in which initial qualification or the re-qualification is sought.
3. A minimum of ten points is required from expanded or new joint activities to qualify for Regional Competitiveness Program funding.
4. No more than ten total points shall be awarded for activities within a single issue area.
5. Existing joint activities that are expanded in scope or in the number of participating localities may be considered a new joint activity but shall not receive the full value of points.

Evaluation Criteria and Scoring System

DHCD will evaluate each existing and proposed joint activity using the following five criteria. These five criteria shall each have a weight assigned to them that will determine how points are awarded under each activity. The criteria and their weights are:

| Criteria | Weight |
|--|---------------|
| The significance of the activity as measured by its impact on regional economic competitiveness | 50% |
| The significance of the activity on improving or strengthening cooperative working relationships among local governments | 35% |
| The complexity or difficulty in carrying out the activity | 5% |
| The amount of fiscal resources committed to implementing the activity | 5% |
| The number of localities participating in the activity | 5% |

The application should discuss the relationship of each existing and proposed joint activity to each of the criteria identified above. DHCD will place heavy emphasis on strategies and actions that impact the regional competitiveness needs identified in the regional strategic plan in making its determination of allocating points.

Adjusting the Issue Area Point Totals

Each of the fourteen issue areas identified in the Regional Competitiveness Act is assigned a total number of points (ranging from a high of ten to a low of two), which can be earned for activities within that category. A region can petition DHCD to adjust the weight of a category upward to reflect the relative importance of that issue on the region's economic competitiveness. In considering its decision to adjust a category point total, DHCD will determine whether or not the issue area has a clearly-defined, vital link to economic competitiveness as identified by the regional strategic plan.

Bonus Points

A region can petition for up to five bonus points by documenting actions taken to reduce the property tax burden throughout the region or actions taken to improve the efficiency of delivery of governmental services. DHCD will use the five criteria outlined above in evaluating these actions to determine the amount of bonus points that may be awarded.

Performance Accountability

Intent

In order for eligible regions to receive continued incentive funding, the partnership must continue to exist and function effectively. Effective functioning is based on the satisfactory implementation of the joint activities outlined in the funding application and on the continued existence of the partnership. DHCD will assess implementation of the joint activities outlined in the funding allocation. Progress in achieving identified outcomes and milestones is the basis of continued funding.

General Guidelines

1. Eligible regions must submit an annual report. The annual report shall identify progress in reaching implementation milestones described in the funding application.
2. Eligible regions that show satisfactory implementation will automatically receive the next year's funding allocation.
3. DHCD recognizes that delays occur in the implementation of complex projects and activities. A region's efforts to resolve and mitigate such delays will be taken into consideration when the annual report is reviewed.
4. Eligible regions that have not been able to implement the joint activities that were the basis of their funding eligibility will not automatically receive the next year's funding allocation.
5. Eligible regions that have experienced implementation problems will have a six-month period in which to "catch up" and take remedial action in implementing its activities. DHCD will provide technical assistance and work with the region to modify its implementation plan, if needed, as long as changes do not affect the joint activities that formed the basis of the region's funding eligibility.
6. Eligible regions that have not been able to resolve implementation problems or make satisfactory revisions to its implementation plan within the six-month "catch up" period will not receive their funding allocation.
7. Funds that are not allocated to regions because of implementation problems will be redistributed to eligible regions in accordance with the funding formula outlined in the Funding Allocation section of the guidelines.
8. A region that has been unable to receive its annual incentive payments for a year or more because of implementation problems may request that payments be resumed in a subsequent fund distribution cycle once satisfactory performance on its existing strategic plan and joint activities has been demonstrated. If the request to reinstate funding is based on a new strategic plan and joint activities, the region will be required to reapply for funding eligibility in a future application round.
9. Changes to a region's configuration and partnership structure may impact implementation of its joint activities. DHCD will review such changes with the

partnership to determine the impact on implementation and the region's funding eligibility.

10. Annual reports will be due to DHCD in May prior to July funding distribution.

Appendix A

Members of the Advisory Committee for the Regional Competitiveness Act

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Appendix B

Application, Re-qualification, and Fund Distribution Schedule

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|------------------|--|
| July 2001 | Partnerships that qualified for the program in July 1997 eligible for fifth year of funding. |
| March 2002 | First round of Re-qualification applications due. |
| July/August 2002 | First round of Re-qualification funding distributed. Partnerships that qualified for the program in December 1997 and in May 1998 eligible for fifth year of funding. |
| March 2003 | Second round of Re-qualification applications due. |
| July/August 2003 | Second round of Re-qualification funding distributed. Partnerships that qualified for the program in May 1999 eligible for fifth year of funding. |
| March 2004 | Third round of Re-qualification applications due. |
| July/August 2004 | Third round of Re-qualification funding distributed. |

Appendix C

Issue Areas and Point Weights

| Issue Area | Weight |
|--|--------|
| Job Creation or Economic Development | 10 |
| Region Revenue Sharing or Growth Sharing Agreement | 10 |
| Education | 10 |
| Human Services | 8 |
| Local Land Use | 8 |
| Housing | 8 |
| Transportation | 5 |
| Law Enforcement | 5 |
| Solid Waste | 4 |
| Water and Sewer Services | 4 |
| Corrections | 3 |
| Fire Services and Emergency Medical Services | 3 |
| Libraries | 2 |
| Parks and Recreation | 2 |